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ABSTRACT

This brief report describes parental reaction to a reinforcement strategy used with children in the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP). Staff members report that "Good Work Awards" (GWAs) are viewed favorably by mothers of students. GWAs are dittoed notes sent home with children when they have met a minimum criterion for daily classroom work. Parent interviews indicate that children enjoy the attention paid at home to them and the awards and that parents apparently feel better informed about their children's progress in school when GWAs are brought home frequently. Some parents further reinforce their children when GWAs are brought home. While the effects of the awards appear positive, further analysis of their uses and functions is suggested. (Author/RH)

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The Kamehameha Early Education Program

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program of The Kamehameha Schools/Bernice P. Bishop Estate. The mission of KEEP is the development, demonstration, and dissemination of methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children. These activities are conducted at the Ka Na'i Pono Research and Demonstration School, and in public classrooms in cooperation with the State Department of Education. KEEP projects and activities involve many aspects of the educational process, including teacher training, curriculum development, and child motivation, language, and cognition. More detailed descriptions of KEEP's history and operations are presented in Technical Reports #1-4.

Abstract

"Good Work Awards" (GWAs) are dittoed notes sent home with children when they have met a minimum criterion for daily classroom work. GWAs are extremely popular with children and teachers, and are used at KEEP as the major "symbolic reinforcer."

The history of GWA development is discussed, however, the major focus is the reaction to the GWA by children's families. There are some problems growing out of insufficient interpretation of the meaning of the GWA to the families, but the major effect is highly positive, resulting in family and child pride in school work, and additional home reinforcement for work at school.

Technical Report #12

"Good Work Awards:"

Effects on Children's Families[1]

Sherlyn Chun Violet Mays

Like most teachers, the teachers at the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) constantly devise techniques that will provide for more effective teaching and learning.

"Good Work Awards" (GWAs) are an example of a successful and spontaneously developed technique. GWAs are dittoed certificates given to children who exhibit behaviors appropriate to the teacher's expectations. The behaviors meriting GWAs varied: remaining seated during story time, completing the most pages in a lesson, answering the most items correctly. In short the individual teacher could, if she found it useful, change the rules, given her desire to reinforce different behaviors over time.

GWAs originated in a particularly restless nap time when the teacher on duty distributed a few such awards to "good nappers." The teacher first glorified the award, stated the precise behaivors a child should exhibit to receive the award, and then chose the deserving children. The scene was now set. From then on, GWAs were used as rewards for all subjects and activities. The children took their awards home and parents proudly displayed them on the walls. The success of the GWA was extraordinary and continued to be effective throughout the school year.

Many factors contributed to the success of the GWAs. The children had

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[1]Tom Weisner, Karen Ito-Chan, and Barbara Herr contributed an important observation to this report.

learned that good work was desirable and this attitude was further developed through verbal and token reinforcements for successive approximations to classroom goals. Verbal reinforcements eventually replaced token ones, and intermittent reinforcement sustained the desired behaviors. GWAs were readily established as motivating reinforcers because they were always paired with verbal reinforcers, a pre-existing reward.

The Effects of GWAs on the Families

During visits by KEEP anthropologists, mothers spontaneously mentioned the GWAs. The majority of mothers visited by the anthropology worker commented favorably on the GWAs and noted their children were pleased when they received one, although one mother was skeptical of the awards and asked what they implied.

Another mother said she appreciated the GWAs because they kept parents informed of a child's progress. She also noted her child was "proud" of the GWAs that she had earned. Without the knowledge of the KEEP staff, the mother had begun to give her daughter small amounts of money when she brought home a GWA.

One mother reported that her son brought some awards home and without comment left them on a shelf with other papers. Once she recognized the GWAs as recognition of good work, she gathered all he had earned and showed them to her husband and her friends. She also asked her son to bring the GWAs directly to her in the future.

One child was reported by the mother to be proud of the GWAs he had earned, but reluctant to talk about them. She kept them on the refrigerator and made a point of showing them to visiting relatives. According to the mother, the boy silently listened and "enjoyed" the attention he thus received.

Home visits also revealed a potential for misunderstanding. One mother

was convinced that her child was progressing splendidly in school because he was receiving a huge number of GWAs. Actually, the child was progressing far too slowly, although he did receive many GWAs for his diligence.

Implications

The introduction of the GWAs served to inform as well as reinforce the children. Parents apparently felt better informed about their children as a result of the frequent receipt of GWAs. This has had obvious implications for the issue of grading and evaluation periods. Perhaps more frequent and specific feedback to parents would be useful.

Also, it is clear that GWAs may have an "intervention" effect on families. When parents begin to reinforce children for earning GWAs, the potential benefits are clear. The extent of this practice requires further investigation, and the consequences for the child's performance ought also to be examined. It is also clear that GWAs need to be carefully explained to families.

Finally, initial experience with GWAs suggest that further analysis of their uses and functions ought to be undertaken both within the classroom and at home.